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The Director of Central Intelligence
Washington, D.C. 20505

National Intelligence Council

27 March 1985

MEMORANDUM FOR: Dr. Gaston Sigur

FROM: Carl W. Ford, Jr.
National Intelligence Officer for East Asia

SUBJECT: Military Force Level in Indochina

1. In response to your inquiry concerning military force level in Indochina and along the Sino-Vietnamese border, I asked DIA to prepare an updated order of battle and conflict outlook paper. Their response is attached.

2. Summarized briefly, the outlook is one of protracted stalemate: The Vietnamese cannot destroy the Cambodian insurgents without greatly increasing their forces along the Thai-Cambodian border, then entering Thailand, which we doubt they will do; the PRC is reluctant to launch a major offensive against Vietnam, a la 1979, because they have higher priority agenda items both internally (modernization) and with the superpowers; the insurgents have yet to develop the popular support base needed to permit extended/expanded operations in the interior of Cambodia--although, the DK and to a lesser degree, the KPNLF to ANS are capable of continuing an annoying level of activity inside Cambodia; and finally, the Thai army and air force, while improving, are more appropriately described as internal security and border defense forces.

3. The Soviet presence, while growing is more important to global affairs than to the situation in Indochina.

4. Overall, conditions are ripe for a negotiated settlement except that the non-negotiable demands of Vietnam and China are in direct opposition--the question of the future of PolPot and the DK.

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5. Indonesia and to a lesser degree other ASEAN countries want to settle the problem and begin integrating Vietnam into an area alignment aimed and blunting PRC hegemony. Most ASEAN countries (to some degree) see China as the real long-term threat, as does Vietnam.

6. The pressure for greater US involvement by ASEAN and Hanoi's efforts to establish relations with the US all have as their hidden agenda the objective of creating a better climate for a negotiated settlement--to date, however, no party is prepared to yield on any of its "demands."

7. I hope this material will help you to answer the query from Bud McFarlane.


Carl W. Ford, Jr.

Attachment
As stated

2
SECRET

SECRET

THE STATUS OF FORCES AND CONFLICT IN INDOCHINA

I. INTRODUCTION

(C) Indochina is the focal point of opposing political and military forces engaged in a protracted conflict for control of Cambodia. For the Vietnamese, consolidation of Cambodia is essential to achieving dominance over Indochina.

(C) These objectives run counter to China's goals of achieving preeminence in the region. Failing to maintain an independent Cambodia in the face of Vietnamese aggression in 1978-79, China now supports Cambodian resistance elements through Thailand and orchestrates direct military pressure on Vietnam's northern border.

(C) Moscow has been able to establish and incrementally increase its military presence in Vietnam because Hanoi needs Soviet support to sustain its economy and armed forces.

II. BALANCE OF FORCES AND MILITARY CAPABILITIES (Table 1)

A. VIETNAM

(S/NF) The People's Army of Vietnam (PAVN) is the largest, most capable military in Southeast Asia. It is a combat experienced and well trained force which has demonstrated the capability to conduct successful joint service and combined arms operations.

(S/NF) Ground Forces: The Army is well-trained and equipped and capable of coordinated multidivision and corps level conventional operations and sustained unconventional operations. It has a limited projection capability and would have difficulty in sustaining a major invasion of an ASEAN state like Thailand. Ground force deployment patterns reflect the primary threat, China. Approximately 600,000 men and the preponderance of armor, artillery and mechanized units are deployed along the northern border and in defense of Hanoi. Vietnam maintains about 50,000 men in Laos and 140,000-160,000 in Cambodia. The remainder--90,000-110,000--are deployed in central and southern Vietnam.

(S/NF) Navy: The Vietnamese Navy is the second largest in Southeast Asia. However, its operations are limited to riverine and coastal patrols and island resupply. It has no underway replenishment capability and air defense and anti-submarine warfare are rudimentary. Since late 1979, the Soviets have provided seventy-five craft including frigates and patrol boats but this has not changed the coastal defense orientation of the force.

(S/NF) Air Force: The Vietnamese Air Force (VAF) is second only to China in total numbers of aircraft. The VAF can conduct effective air defense and ground attacks against regional forces, with the possible exception of China.

SECRET

SECRET

B. CAMBODIA

(S/NF) The People's Republic of Kampuchea (PRK) has a small ground force and no navy or air force. Most--some 23,000 troops--are organized into provincial units assigned interior security duties. The remaining 12,000 are organized into four understrength divisions deployed along the Thai-Cambodian border. Most of the forces are equipped as light-infantry, but small specialized units are receiving increasing numbers of tanks and artillery.

(S/NF) The capability of PRK forces has shown marked improvement since 1983. During the recent dry season offensive the PRK Army augmented PAVN forces and conducted a limited independent operation against the KPNLF camp at O Bok. The Vietnamese retain operational control of the PRK forces but have a long term objective of the PRK assuming all internal security duties.

(S/NF) Vietnamese forces in Cambodia are organized into twelve infantry and one engineer division with a strength of 140,000-160,000 men. Eighty percent of the forces are conscripts from Southern Vietnam with low morale and high rates of desertion.

C. LAOS

(C) The Lao armed forces has evolved from a small guerilla organization to a conventional army. Because of its limited assets Laos is dependent upon PAVN forces.

(S/NF) The primary missions of Vietnamese forces in Laos are to insure the loyalty of the government and support the Lao military's campaign against the resistance. PAVN forces include four infantry and two engineer divisions with support units for a total of 50,000 men. The troops are northerners and considered reliable. Their equipment is primarily small arms.

(S) Ground Forces: The ground forces have limited equipment assets and are capable of conducting only battalion size operations.

(C) Navy: The Lao Navy is a very small force--about 500 men--with a primary mission of riverine patrols.

(S/NF) Air Force: The air force is capable of performing only small scale tactical fighter operations with emphasis on ground attack missions. A lack of training and combat experience further limits their capability. Air defense assets are limited to light and medium AAA systems and one known SA-3 site.

D. THAILAND

(S/NF) The Thai armed forces are only marginally capable of resisting a determined Vietnamese attack. Modernization of Thai forces began in 1975 and gained added impetus after the 1978 Vietnamese occupation of Cambodia. In

SECRET

SECRET

general, improvement of capabilities remain constrained by insufficient senior command and staff supervision and training.

(S/NF) Ground Forces: The Thai army can operate effectively at the regiment level and below. It has never trained or operated at division level or above. Moreover, there is insufficient training in joint service and combined arms operations. Force modernization has resulted in a fifty percent personnel strength increase, the formation of three new infantry divisions, and the addition of new armor, artillery and special forces divisions. The expansion of the Army has been accompanied by significant equipment acquisitions including medium and light tanks, 105 mm and 155 mm howitzers, recoilless rifles, and anti-tank guided missiles. Logistics remains a major weakness.

(S/NF) Despite the Vietnamese threat, most Army units remain concentrated in Bangkok and others are dispersed in the provinces. Forces along the Thai-Cambodian border have received minimal reinforcement compared to the increased strength of PAVN forces in Cambodia.

(S/NF) Navy: The Thai Navy is the largest in Southeast Asia. It is capable of limited sea surveillance patrols in the Gulf of Thailand and the Andaman Sea and has a sealift capacity of up to one reinforced battalion. Their anti-submarine and mine warfare capabilities are marginal at best. The Navy's capability to conduct sustained operations is hampered by poor maintenance and supply shortages.

(S/NF) Air Force: Air defense is the primary mission of the Royal Thai Air Force (RTAF). Its capability to conduct offensive air and ground attack operations is minimal and it cannot sustain extended all-weather day and night operations. Deficiencies in command, control, and communications assets and management procedures preclude efficient employment of air assets. The lack of advanced fighters, an inadequate air defense battle management system, and aging support equipment restrict Thailand's capability to defeat the Vietnamese Air Force in a major engagement.

III. REGIONAL CONFLICT

A. CAMBODIA

(S/NF) Since the 1978 invasion of Cambodia Vietnam has conducted repeated campaigns against communist and non-communist resistance groups encamped along the Thai-Cambodian border. In a series of wet season buildups and dry season offensives the PAVN has tried to contain the resistance and prevent its expansion into the interior. The recently concluded dry season offensive was the largest and most successful.

(S/NF) This year PAVN forces in Cambodia, reinforced with an additional two divisions, attacked resistance forces in a series of well planned coordinated combined arms operations along the entire border. The PAVN successfully destroyed all resistance base camps forcing most inhabitants to

SECRET

SECRET

flee into Thailand (Map). During the remainder of this dry season and into the wet, the Vietnamese will likely construct barriers and maintain forces in forward positions to discourage infiltration and reestablishment of base camps.

(S/NF) Despite Vietnamese successes against the camps, the resistance was not defeated militarily. Casualties were relatively light and equipment losses were minimal. Regional states have not been discouraged from continuing their support. However, resistance leaders have been told that continued support is contingent upon their adopting a guerrilla strategy which takes the fighting to the interior of Cambodia.

(S/NF) Thus, a major impact of the recent PAVN offensive has been to discredit the resistance strategy of focusing efforts along the border rather than on interior guerrilla operations. Resistance leaders reportedly recognize the need to change their strategy and have the arms required. Whether they will abandon the previous course and actively implement the new strategy remains to be seen.

B. SINO-VIETNAMESE BORDER

(S/NF) Since the 1979 Chinese incursion into Vietnam the intensity of conflict along the border has risen and fallen in concert with the level of Vietnamese operations in Cambodia. In this way the Chinese have sought to moderate Vietnamese pressure in Cambodia. Beijing also uses this orchestration of force to underscore its commitment to Thailand's security, and hopes to convince Hanoi that the costs of aggression in Cambodia outweighs any gains it seeks through force of arms.

(S/NF) Currently the Chinese have massed along the Vietnamese border approximately 225,000 troops. The majority of these--about 125,000--are concentrated in the Malipo area (Map). China has also improved its command, control, and communications and logistics infrastructure in the border area. This is the largest buildup of Chinese forces since the 1979 incursion, but is short of levels required to successfully repeat a large scale operation into Vietnam.

(S/NF) The Vietnamese have committed seven infantry corps (43 divisions) to the defense of Hanoi. The bulk of these forces, four corps, are deployed on the high ground of the border in fortified positions along the most likely avenues of Chinese approach. The terrain--steep hills, jungle and narrow river valleys--favors the defending PAVN forces. Invading Chinese forces would suffer high casualties. However, the Chinese do retain a tactical advantage by being able to selectively mass their forces for limited operations at key points. The PAVN would have difficulty in responding with an effective defense against all Chinese attack options.

C. SPRATLY ISLANDS

(S/NF) Another potential area of conflict between Vietnam and China is the Spratly Islands. The claimants to these small islands, cays, and reefs

SECRET

SECRET

include Vietnam, China, Taiwan, the Philippines, and Malaysia. All claimants but the Chinese have a presence in the Spratlys. The Vietnamese maintain garrisons totalling 750 men on nine of the islands. Spratly Island has the only Vietnamese airstrip, but the short runway precludes landings by fighter aircraft. Fighters launched from Vietnam could reach the islands, but would have very restricted loiter time. The Vietnamese Navy's lack of an open ocean capability would also hamper operations in the Islands. China has the naval forces to take the islands, but would not be able to provide effective air cover. Because of the political liabilities attendant with an attack on even the Vietnamese-held portions of the Spratlys, China is not likely to mount a serious move against the islands.

IV. SOVIET PRESENCE

(S/NF) Soviet military aid to Vietnam has exceeded 5.5 billion dollars since 1978, including 575 million dollars in 1984. Equipment transfers include MiG-21 aircraft; SU-22 fighters, Mi-24 helicopters, PETYA class frigates, OSA II missile attack boats, T-54/55 tanks and SA2/3 missiles. Supporting this aid package is a Soviet military advisory group of over 2,500 personnel commanded by a Colonel General.

(S/NF) Moscow also provides considerable direct support to Cambodia and Laos to cultivate bilateral relations. Soviet military aid to Cambodia for the period 1979-mid 1984 totalled approximately 230 million dollars and 100 military advisors.

(S/NF) Despite the aid costs, Moscow has gained major benefits from its treaty relationship with Hanoi. Use of facilities at Cam Ranh Bay (CRB) is by far the greatest of Vietnam's concessions. It is now the most substantial naval and air forward deployment base outside the Warsaw Pact. Currently there are sixteen BADGERS, fourteen MiG-23 FLOGGERS and as many as eight BEAR D/F aircraft deployed at CRB airfield at any one time. Approximately 27 to 33 ships deployed to the South China Sea use Cam Ranh naval base.

V. OUTLOOK

(C) Developments in Indochina will continue to drive political and military dynamics in Southeast Asia for the foreseeable future. All principals seem committed to their objectives. This means continued political maneuvering and limited military conflict. Resolution of the Cambodian problem through a negotiated settlement satisfactory to all parties seems highly unlikely.

(C) The modernization of Vietnamese and Thai forces are likely to continue at present rates with commensurate increases in capabilities. The PRK forces under Vietnamese tutelage will gradually assume a greater role. An increased threat to Thai security seems unlikely unless the resistance becomes more effective in Cambodia.

(S/NF) The future of the PAVN campaign in Cambodia depends on how the resistance adjusts to the expulsion from the base camps. If resistance

SECRET

SECRET

operations are shifted to Cambodia's interior, PAVN/PRK forces will have to redeploy. The communist resistance is thought to have significant capability to operate in the interior. They reportedly have pre-positioned arms caches there and already conduct some interior operations.

(C) If the non-communist resistance is unable or unwilling to adopt a classical guerrilla strategy it will likely stagnate in Thailand. Regardless of what course is taken, it is unlikely that its base camps along the border can be reestablished given PAVN forces remaining in the border area.

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(S/NF) It is likely that China will continue to apply pressure along the Sino-Vietnamese border to reaffirm its support for Thailand and would probably increase the pressure if Thai security were threatened. There is little likelihood of a major Chinese incursion given the current balance of forces. China does not want to pay the economic and political costs of a major punitive campaign. However, Beijing will likely continue its tactics of seizing and holding key terrain in Vietnam.

(S/NF) We do not expect Hanoi to reinforce the border area further. As new and more modern equipment becomes available it will be given to northern units on a priority basis.

(S/NF) The likelihood of any near term conflict in the Spratly Islands is considered low. However, discovery of seabed natural resources in commercially viable grades and quantities could alter this view considerably.

(S/NF) The Soviet presence in the area will continue to expand. Additional aviation and naval air assets will likely be deployed and more construction of permanent facilities is expected.

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Table 1
Regional Forces

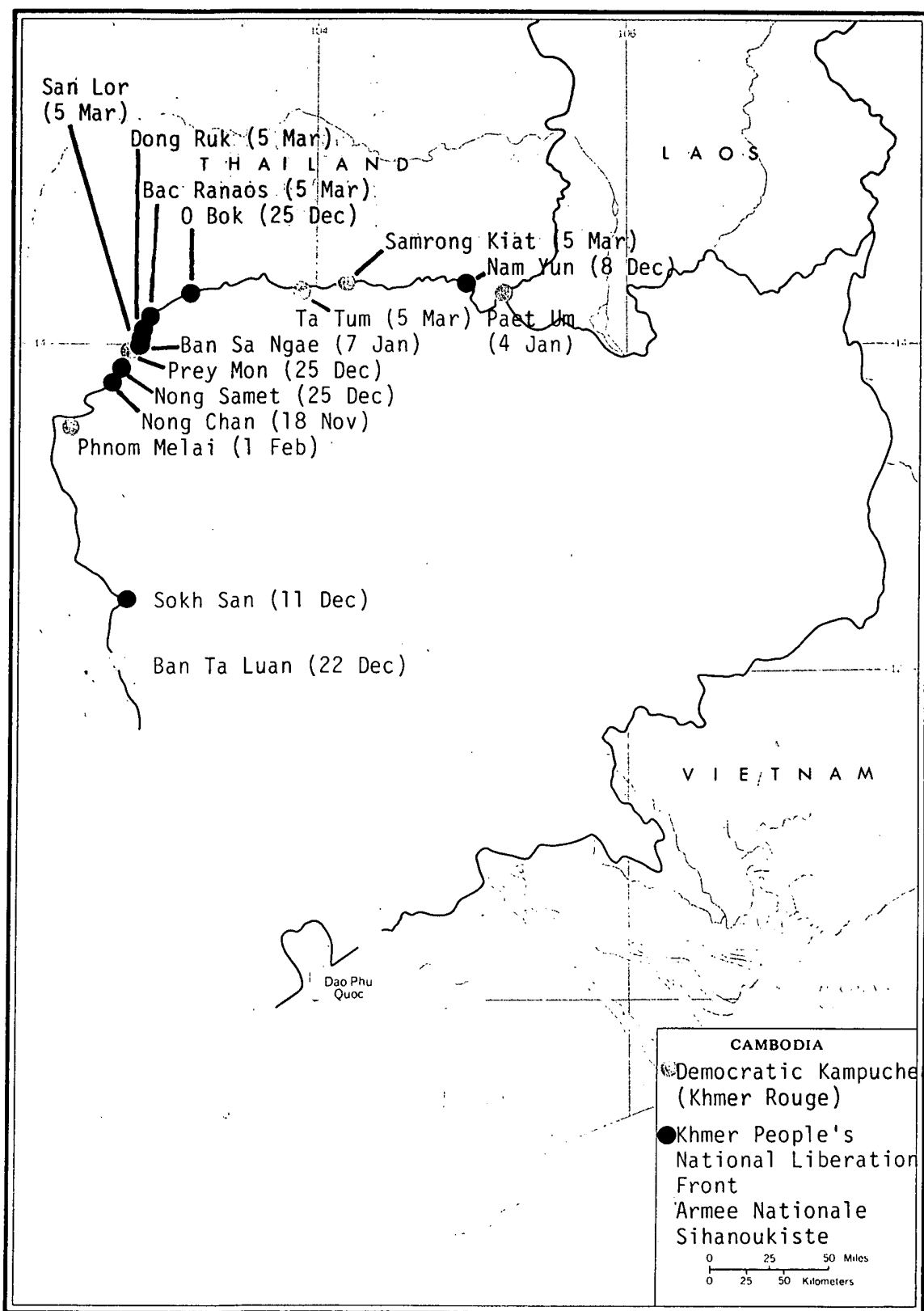
	Thailand	Vietnam	Cambodia	Laos
<u>Armed Forces</u>				
Total Strength	253,000	950,000*	35,000 (PRK)	55,000
<u>Army</u>				
Strength	190,000	900,000	35,000	52,500
Units	Divs: 8 Inf 1 Armor 2 Spec Force 1 Artillery 1 AAA	Corps: 10 Div: 60 Arm Bde: 9 AAA Bde: 11 Arty Bde: 19	Div: 4 Arty: 5 bns AAA: 4 bns Arms: 2 bns	Div: 5 Arty: 4 bns AAA: 10 bns Arm: 2 bns
<u>Equipment</u>				
Armor	APC: 291 Tanks: 264 (med & lt)	APC: 1000 Tanks: 2000	APC: 20 Tanks: 40	APC: 60 Tanks: 60
Artillery	105mm: 264 155mm: 94	Arty: 3000 (75mm or larger)	Arty: 60 75mm or larger)	Arty: 250 (75mm or larger)
<u>Marines</u>				
Strength	20,000	30,000	N/A	N/A
Units	2 Inf Rgt, 1 Arty Rgt	10 Bdes	N/A	N/A
<u>Air Force**</u>				
Strength	43,000	15,000	N/A	2,000
<u>Aircraft</u>				
Fighters	52	173	N/A	27
Gd Attack	100	40		
Transp	47	48	13 (shown/ maintained by Soviets)	14
Helicopters	44	84		8
<u>Navy</u>				
Strength	40,000 (incl Marines)	42,000 (30,000 Marines)		500
Ships	201 all types	165 all types (107 operational)		25 patrol boats

*Reflects a decrease in strength from 1.2 million resulting from a reanalysis of the strength of PAVN divisions.

**Numbers do not include training assets.

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RESISTANCE BASES ATTACKED BY THE VIETNAMESE THIS DRY SEASON



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